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Bringing the Citizen Back In: Democratic Dimensions of Local Reforms in Germany and Japan

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Abstract Since the 1990s, local governments in many countries have responded to the crisis of public finances, legitimacy, and a low level of performance with a combination of territorial and functional reforms, and the introduction of management and political reforms. This article focuses on the latter by analyzing new modes of citizen participation in Germany and Japan. It will employ theoretical assumptions from the local governance debate in order to explore the democratic dimensions of local government reforms. The question considered is concerned with the political context for new modes of participation and whether they can offer opportunities for an improvement of local democracy in terms of an increase in legitimacy and political capacity building for citizens. The conclusion will be reached that while we would expect more favorable preconditions in Germany with regard to a positive impact on local democracy, the opposite is the case: a relatively weak tradition of local autonomy and low resources of civil society actors in Japan explains their focus on co-production of services with local governments but at the same time offers greater opportunities for an improvement in local democracy.

Keywords Citizen participation in Germany and Japan · Civil society · Local governance · Local government reforms · New Public Management

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, local government reforms have been on the political agenda in many European democracies. All of these reforms have been driven mostly by the need to reduce public spending, while maintaining democratic legitimacy. Theoretically, legitimacy can be gained by the improvement of output factors such as the provision of services that meet the demands of local citizens or input factors

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including the integration of local citizens into the policy-making process by new modes of participation ([34], pp. 11–12). Theoretical approaches concerning new modes of citizens' participation indicate that, at least in European countries, institutionalization as well as implementation depends on the degree of local autonomy from central control as well as the scale and scope of civil society actors. According to this research, high local autonomy is linked to a high degree of citizen involvement and normative expectations of citizen integration in terms of an improvement in local democracy. At the same time, tradition and strength of local civil society actors can be considered crucial, not only for the shaping of new participatory modes but for their realization as well ([7], p. 35).

This article will employ these theoretical assumptions in order to explore the democratic dimensions of local reforms and will extend the existing empirical research by considering Germany and Japan. Both countries have introduced participatory reforms along with financial, functional, and territorial reforms since the early 1990s. However, they differ in terms of tradition of local autonomy as well as the structure and practices of civil society. While Japan is said to have a strong central dominance over local affairs and only a short tradition of citizen engagement, Germany is a federal state with a long tradition of civil society. The results support the assumption that differences in scale and scope of civil society actors are crucial at least for the implementation of participation in local affairs. Weak tradition of local autonomy and low resources of civil society actors in Japan explain both the leading role of local governments in shaping cooperation with citizens and the focus of citizens on co-production of services. However, it will be argued that this will be an opportunity for citizens to acquire experiences and qualify as partners of local governments.

Section 1

Institutional Settings and Traditions of Local Autonomy

In Germany, the concept of local self-administration dates back to the early 19th century. Citizens were obligated to contribute to the administration of their municipality. In 1808, the Stein Reforms granted Prussian cities a certain measure of self-government. Furthermore these reforms determined that citizens were duty-bound to take on an honorary office if elected to the city council. However, the majority of citizens were excluded from this kind of participation and thus a democratic impetus can hardly be attributed to it. Rather, civic commitment was used by municipalities as a resource for local self-administration ([37], p. 118). The tradition of "municipal social services" by means of civic engagement was maintained throughout the transitions of 1945. Today municipal policy corresponds to the three structural principles of the self-government concept determined by German Basic Law: civility, autonomy, and the right to regulate all local affairs on their own responsibility. The role of municipalities as an independent provider of local public services has never been questioned.

Within this tradition, citizens were and are still regarded as an active and integral part of local self-administration. The system of honorary offices has been maintained

in the courts as well as in city councils and has been further extended to include all domains of local politics, especially regarding public services. Usually local associations and non-profit supra-regional organizations are those who volunteer through honorary offices. Moreover, the vertical integration of local associations into umbrella organizations strengthens their local involvement due to joint fund allocation and networking. Municipalities encourage local civic engagement in different ways. Mostly, associations can rely on a system of support that offers them basic funding and project-related assistance. In principle, allocations of funds are not questioned, but the amount of money allocated might differ according to the financial state of the respective municipality.

In Japan, the principle of local self-government, following the Prussian model, was introduced towards the end of the 19th century in an effort to modernize the new nation state. A year prior to the ratification of the *Meiji* constitution in 1889, the municipal code was adopted but never integrated into the constitution itself and thereby failed to counter the strong notion of a central state ([21], p. 187). Nevertheless, the citizens were integrated in local politics through neighborhood associations with the households as mandatory members. Thus cooperation between municipality and citizens was channeled through collective actors rather than individuals. In addition to neighborhood assistance, the associations were responsible for community tasks such as fire prevention and disaster control as well as mediating between citizens and the local administration. The handling of intrinsic municipal services, such as the keeping of household registers, and the proximity to citizens made neighborhood associations an easy target for political instrumentalization during the Pacific War ([9], p. 33; [24], p. 163). This was the main reason why neighborhood associations were made illegal and local politics were freed from central state control by guaranteeing local autonomy under the new constitution of 1947. Against this background, the introduction of citizens' initiatives and direct election of mayors and members of the city council aimed at supporting local democracy.

However, during the 1950s many of the local services were retransferred to the national level. Local governments again became bound to the central government by the agency-delegated function system, according to which they were expected to implement functions delegated to them by the central government agencies in return for government funding. Rigid financial control by the central government brought about the fusion of functions and inevitably led to an erosion of local autonomy ([17], p. 70–74). Thus far, the integration of citizens into local politics has been carried out detached from the unfinished reform of local self-government. After a short period of prohibition, neighborhood associations and the closely related youths' and women's groups have today come to support local administrative and public service functions. They receive public subsidies from local governments for neighborly assistance, as well as reimbursement of expenses for their speaker. Although some authors regard them as part of civil society [32], their engagement more often than not is at least socially semi-mandatory, limited to their very neighborhood, and focused on the execution of demands of local governments ([20], p. 142). In addition, their role during the Pacific War is a contributing factor to their absence from the Japanese debate concerning the revaluation of the relation between citizens and the state in the context of local reforms [35]. The notion of citizens as a

partner of local governments is attributed to non-profit organizations (NPOs) or local groups beyond the neighborhood, which is regarded as a new social phenomenon ([20], p. 145).

Section 2

Strength of Local Civil Society

In recent years, Germany has seen an increase in volunteering and civic engagement. About 80 percent of volunteering takes place at the local level, which reaffirms the importance of the municipality in regard to the relation of citizen and state. In 2006, there were 594,377 registered associations, and common estimations assume that there are up to 350,000 unregistered associations [10]. It is estimated that roughly 36 percent of all citizens older than 13 years actively participate in associations and other charitable organizations. Overall this means that about 23.4 million people, men and women alike, are actively engaging themselves in organizations of civil society. In particular, middle-aged women belonging to the well-educated middle class make up a huge share of all active citizens ([1], p. 15).

The scope of activities is wide with the most important fields of activities being sports, culture, education, and religion. Aside from these more traditional groups there are plenty of civil groups that are active in fields that were introduced by the new social movements of the 1970s. In these groups, activities revolve around issues such as environmental protection, civil rights, or gender equality. Both types of civil groups appeal to different age groups and social strata. Thus civic society has become diversified and is now able to offer anyone who wants to become active the right group. Seen from the opposite angle, for municipalities the potential for civic social partners seems to be immense. Municipalities support civil society groups through indirect and direct means such as grants, favorable tax regulations for both civil groups and donors, and fees. Compared to Germany, Japan does not have this kind of tradition regarding registered associations. Despite the existence of civic groups that have emerged since the modernization process towards the end of the 19th century, self-organized participation in local politics and volunteering for the common good is recognized to have existed only since the 1970s. In 2005, about 26 percent of all Japanese citizens older than 10 years were active in civic society, of which only half were organized into groups [29].

Since the passing of the NPO Law in 1998, the state now offers organized civil groups a legal status that allows them to be officially recognized. The number of registered NPOs has increased since then from 1,005 NPOs in 1999, to 41,259 in 2011 [15]. Also, it is estimated that another 200,000 to 450,000 groups are active without having obtained a legal status ([6], p. 145). Similar to Germany, most of their activities revolve around the local level, but in general the share of active citizens is smaller in Japan as the majority of groups have fewer than 50 members ([33], p. 37). Data from 2005 suggest that women outnumber men to a great extent in volunteer activities in the fields of social service such as caring for the elderly or handicapped. Male engagement is only predominant in sports and science and slightly so in safety promotion or disaster prevention activities [30]. While women

volunteer more often alone, with friends or in volunteer organizations, men are more likely to engage themselves in the more traditional neighborhood associations [29]. The common assumption is that the predominance of female engagement leads to a smaller scope and scale of activities of new civil society actors such as NPOs because women mainly volunteer in social activities around their neighborhoods, thus, reducing the fields of activities and consequently influencing the areas where municipalities can cooperate with such civic actors.

Local government support for civil society groups is mainly limited to the provision of infrastructure such as the maintenance of NPO or volunteer centers. Additionally, municipalities assist these centers in the process of creating their own website for better networking among themselves. However, usually no basic funding is provided, but project-related financial support may be available. Local administration therefore seems to play a pivotal role for the promotion of local civil society. Due to insufficient financial resources, civil society groups depend on local governments for securing preconditions for engagement as well as the realization of their projects.

Section 3

Participatory Reforms of Local Governments: the Background

One of the most influential driving forces behind the reform of local policy making has been the crisis of public finances. In Germany, the aftermath of reunification placed a financial burden on the municipalities, thus exerting pressure on local governments to implement reforms. In Japan, municipalities were under similar financial pressure after the speculative bubble burst in the 1990s. Public services saw and still see themselves faced with the challenge to cut costs. Furthermore, demographic change, which statistically affects Japan even more than Germany, has only exacerbated the dire financial situation.

This is the context in which both countries' bureaucratic efficiency came into focus and stimulated the revaluation of the relation between control by the central government or the federal-states and local autonomy. Local responsibilities have been extended while finances remained restricted. The crucial financial burden of local governments has resulted in a crisis in social service and a decrease in citizens' satisfaction with the performance of the local government. Local authorities in both countries have responded to the combination of financial crisis and increased responsibility for local services with two sets of countermeasures. On the one hand, they are striving for an improvement in efficiency of the administration, and they are addressing local citizens as partners on the other hand.

In Germany more than fostering input legitimacy by introducing means of participation, the aims of public sector reform were mainly concerned with output legitimacy by improving the efficiency of local administrations ([34], p. 21). Under the catchphrase New Public Management (NPM), internal modernization of local governments was sought through restructuring and delegation of functions from the national level to the local level ([16], p. 60). For local governments this meant the extension of functions and a broader scope for decision making, while simulta-

neously facing an increase in expenditures. Despite differences across municipalities, in general little of the new scope for decision making could actually be used for independent policy making due to the constant threat of a financial deficit ([13], p. 125–126).

In Japan, similar reforms were implemented towards the end of the 1990s. As in Germany, local governments followed the NPM approach and focused on financial as well as on territorial and functional reforms. These reforms aimed at redefining the relationship between local and central government. Since the decentralization reforms of 2000, the state and its central government have withdrawn from the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies in those policy areas that are in close proximity to the citizen ([5], p. 77). The delegation of central state responsibilities to local governments without a legal basis has been abolished. In addition, local governments still represent the lowest level of administration but have received a new scope for policy decision making. A respective fiscal reform has not been fully implemented yet. In this regard, local dependence on central state grants remains crucial and continues to limit local autonomy. From the perspective of a functional reform, it is therefore not surprising that a second wave of reforms has been regarded as necessary and targets the citizen as a partner of local government.

In both countries, the move towards more citizen involvement in the local arena coincided with a general boom in civil engagement. In Germany, the rapid growth of the number of civil society groups has been attributed to the reunification, which of course affected the new federal-states profoundly. In Japan, a similar effect has been attributed to two important occurrences: the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 as well as the Kobe earthquake in 1995 are seen as benchmarks that stimulated volunteer activities ([6], p. 133).

Section 4

The Notion of Cooperation Between Citizen and Local Governments

The move towards the integration of local citizens into the local government reform process has opened the path towards a new leitmotif (guiding principle) in local politics—the *Bürgerkommune* in German or *shimin jichi* in Japan. The guiding principle behind these terms is a shift towards local governance that includes the citizen as an important actor.

In Japan, in the late 1980s the term *kyōdō* was coined to describe the new relationship between the state and the individual. A 2006 survey on promoting cooperation between NPOs and local governments by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications defined *kyōdō* as “equal partnership,” “ $1+1=3$ synergy effects,” and the “strengthening of local authority through citizen autonomy” [28]. According to the Ministry, the practical implementation of these new cooperation principles comprises a whole range of processes in local politics: cooperation concerning planning and formulation of political measures as well as cooperation in the implementation and evaluation of municipal services. An explicit remark about the democratic legitimacy creating cooperation was not included. However, the reference to the strengthening of local citizen autonomy can be seen as one indicator

that the political dimension of partnership between the citizen and the local government is included in the concept of *kyōdō*.

Political practice on the local level has yet to include this broad understanding of *kyōdō*. Municipalities tend to neglect the broader meaning and rather use a more restrictive understanding of the term. In this regard, partnership is equated with outsourcing, collaboration of citizen and municipality in local projects as well as the participation of local governments in projects.

The concept of cooperation was also referred to as a basic principle of the Hatoyama government in a speech made by Hatoyama shortly after his party had won the election of 2009. He argued that the citizen as a “resident subject” has to take on more responsibility for his or her immediate living environment [11]. In this regard, the responsibility lies within the citizen as a resident and is focused upon voluntary participation, whereas the function of the state remains to encourage and support citizen engagement. In any case, the term “partnership” has been introduced to express something new, namely a relationship that is characterized by “reflecting together, breaking a sweat together, and bearing the risk together” ([19], p. 218). In those communities where rules concerning partnerships already exist, the idea of cooperation between citizens and the administration to improve the quality of life in local communities is predominant.

In Germany one of the most prominent definitions of a *Bürgerkommune* states that “within a *Bürgerkommune* people, and private as well as public institutions including the municipality, voluntarily and equally cooperate and engage to complement each other to achieve an advancement of the common good within their local territory or region. Nobody is excluded” ([22], p. 27). The Enquete-Commission “The Future of Civic Engagement” explicitly links the guiding principle of *Bürgerkommune* with the concept of democratic self-legislation: “The idea of civil society is connected with the idea of self-legislation. This means that citizens should take part in and influence political decision-making processes outside the limits of direct democratic measures where they are only able to cast a vote in an election for example. This kind of self-legislation—the essence of the principle of democracy—has to remain effective and visible in the process of legislation in civil society ([4], p. 282). Participation is seen as political participation by direct democratic means. Furthermore, citizens are given the function of participating and articulating interests, which also includes the ability to give and receive criticism. Within this concept the role of the state is to activate citizens and, in this regard, to provide all the necessary conditions for participation. The key elements of this concept are similar to the Japanese notion of *kyōdō* in terms of the pluralistic structure of actors, closeness to daily local life, and the focus on the shaping of a local community. The state is not explicitly mentioned but is only one among several actors. It describes local governance as a structure of pluralistic policy making with and for citizens.

The notions of *Bürgerkommune* as well as of *shimin jichi* follow the idea that public administration and local citizens share the responsibility and the goals for the improvement of community life and should cooperate in terms of functional division of labor. Local government reforms are connected with political reforms that integrate the citizen as an involved contributor to local issues. Whereas, in Germany, participation focuses on the involvement of citizens in the formulation of policies, in

Japan, the focus lies on strengthening the self-responsibility of citizens. In both countries the call for citizens to join back in is made within a framework of increased local responsibility but also strong financial restrictions.

In both countries, debates have been triggered by these highly normative concepts. The assessment of new forms of participation is rather controversial. One side argues that local governments are mainly pursuing local efficiency and the use of citizens is one tool to achieve this goal. In this regard, participation and civic engagement are subject to the criteria of efficiency. The other side articulates the far-reaching expectation that participation of citizens in local politics would ideally lead to an increase in democracy by strengthening political deliberation. Fostering legitimacy and acceptance of politics and the positive integration of citizens in their living environment could eventually affect democratic elements as a whole and thus truly realize a cooperation of citizens and the state ([26], pp. 14 ff.; [34], p. 15).

Moreover, an increase in efficiency of state activities as well as an enhancement of cheaper public services is also expected. While supporters rejoice in this aspect of creating more efficiency, there are also plenty of critical opinions being voiced. Most of them are connected to the fear that citizens and their voluntary participation are exploited to serve as cheap service providers ([12], p. 98).

Nevertheless, the main emphasis in the debate differs in each country: In Japan the idea of *partnership between citizens and local governments* represents a substantial paradigm shift. As demonstrated by the enactment of the NPO law in 1998, the citizen is revalued as a partner fully capable of securing and improving local living conditions. The revaluation of the citizen as an equal partner shapes the debate towards the expectation that a profound democratization occurs and consequently focuses its interest on the expansion of the scope of modes for political participation. In this regard, even issues that go beyond the new modes of participation are addressed. For instance, the qualification and politicization of city councilors and mayors as well as the broadening of the scope of forms of political participation such as deliberative councils are discussed as pivotal prerequisites for local democracy [36]. First and foremost, the clarification of legal aspects, such as the binding referenda or the institutional strengthening of participation within the phase of policy planning and formulation, is high up on the agenda. On the other hand, a critical discussion of citizen participation in the light of efficiency or legitimacy has rarely occurred.

In Germany, the increasing variety of political forms of participation has also been viewed in a positive way. Bogumil ([2], p. 28) concluded that the biggest winners of local reforms are citizens and civic groups because citizens will have procured a stronger position within the process of local decision making through the application of the new modes of direct and cooperative democracy. However, there is a broad consensus that the main concept behind the *Bürgerkommune* is not an entirely new idea but rather an extension of previous concepts of integration of citizens in local politics. In comparison with the Japanese debate, the difference in the evaluation of recent changes can be attributed to a different theoretical starting point: From the NPM perspective, nowadays predominant in the German debate, the legitimacy-producing aspect of participation is not questioned, but the efficiency of new modes of participation is seen as questionable ([13], p. 81 ff.). On the other side, for those arguing from the civil society perspective, the integration of citizens into policy-

making processes is merely a consequential extension of civic engagement for municipalities, which consequently does not include a reintroduction of democratic theoretical considerations ([37], p. 121).

Section 5

Institutions of New Modes of Citizen Participation

Since the early 1990s, Germany and Japan have experienced the introduction of new modes of citizen participation as part of diverse reform programs of local governments. These innovations are accompanied by a paradigm shift from a state-centered policy-making structure towards an inclusive model of local policy making. Few numbers exist concerning the quantitative dimension of the introduction of participatory reforms in both countries. In Japan, 84 out of 1,800 municipalities have implemented the principle of partnership by means of a basic municipal ordinance of local government and thus have truly implemented new modes of participation. In Germany, local referenda and citizens' initiatives were introduced in most areas by the mid-1990s.

These new modes of participatory governance can be differentiated according to the participation within the planning or formulation of policies, their implementation, and their evaluation ([27], p. 9–10; [7], p. 29). Substantial differences can be found between municipalities in each country and even more so when local initiatives in the two countries are compared. In this regard, generalizations should only be made carefully. At the same time however, modes of participation in Japan show great similarity to their German counterparts. This is only logical because some of these forms were explicitly adopted from German political practice, such as the citizen deliberative council [25].

One major feature of new modes of participation is that local administrations, together with citizens, form advisory bodies, which are mostly organized on a short- or medium-term basis and fulfill an advisory function. In Germany, these advisory bodies are seen as having the most significant impact on aspects of democratic theory ([3], p. 84). Typical forms are citizen forums or citizen assemblies. Citizen forums develop a policy recommendation for local politics, usually within a timeframe of only a few days. Participants are randomly selected among all citizens by the municipality. Participation is not mandatory but voluntary. Key issues that are discussed are city marketing, crime prevention, and district-related social work ([12], p. 161–162). Participants are generally exempt from work and receive compensation for any loss of earnings. Deliberative councils follow the same principle but are generally smaller and mainly concerned with urban development and planning. Any results or conclusions of such assemblies are consequently taken up and discussed by the city council. Additionally, within the framework of the “social city” program, which was introduced in 1999 by the national government, a variety of new forms of participation concerning certain residential areas were created. Most importantly, neighborhood self-management and district conferences were implemented. Participation in such conferences is voluntary and open to any group or person. Furthermore, citizens are traditionally integrated in an advisory board of the city

councils as experts, such as in the council of foreign residents or board of senior residents. Information about the opportunity for participation in such councils is publicly announced and activities are usually funded by the city.

In Japan, similar modes for political participation have been gradually introduced since 2000, some of them explicitly referring to the German experience. Deliberative councils in particular have been introduced by municipal ordinances related to citizen participation. In addition, the most important participatory institution for policy advice is the so-called community council, which was implemented by the revised Local Autonomy Law (*chiho jichi-ho*) in 2000. Participants are usually appointed by the mayor and represent local citizen groups, neighborhood associations, and parent-teacher associations. Each conference determines its code of practice, modes of decision making, and the members of the executive boards on its own. These conferences are to produce policy recommendations for the mayor before the actual decision-making process starts. In this regard, local administrations and mayors call upon such institutions to deliberate on local issues in order to foster local solidarity ([23], p. 22).

Following the idea of this participation model, several municipalities have developed their own forms of citizen conferences. These are open for individual or even corporate members, who can be appointed or apply on their own. In particular, administrative advisory bodies such as deliberative councils have opted for a hybrid form —allowing citizens to apply openly, but allowing the selection to be made by the administration. In any case, the mayor formally makes the final decision. Conferences work on one thematic issue within a set timeframe. In certain progressive local governments, citizens even participate in the formulation of municipal ordinances or codes of practice concerning partnerships. Usually, municipalities take the initiative in calling upon councils to debate issues. However, results or policy recommendations are not directly taken into account by the actual political decision-making process, but only serve as a point of reference for public opinion or grounds for discussion for established administrative deliberative councils. These remain the conventional form of policy deliberation. Members of such councils are appointed by the mayor and are representatives of local businesses and media as well as local scientists or experts and strongly influence the actual decision making of the city council. With regard to the implementation of local politics, partnership between citizens and local administration usually relates to cooperation in the provision of social services or urban development, which plays a decisive role in both countries.

In German municipalities, civil associations are not only in charge of the implementation of social services, but also serve as sponsors of charitable and welfare institutions. Examples of such organizations are support associations that promote the arts, provide meals on wheels, and offer care for the elderly. Region-specific research on associations as well as analysis related to policy ([38], p. 137 ff.) clearly demonstrates the broad scope of contribution by associations and other charitable organizations to the provision of public services at the local level. Studies have also demonstrated the integration of such associations in the provision of public services within the framework of German local self-government.

In Japan services are delegated from municipalities to citizen groups or are offered by groups to the administration. Such cooperative projects generally deal

with social issues or city beautification. According to a survey by the Cabinet Office in 2007, 75 percent of all NPOs have worked in cooperative projects with municipalities in the past 2 years. Of these, about 36 percent have provided public services that were delegated and financially supported by local administrations. Additionally, roughly 28 percent carry out joint events with the administration on a regular basis and 6 percent offer events solely for administration workers ([18], p. 3).

Finally, municipalities in both countries have introduced measures to involve citizens in the evaluation of administrative work. In this regard, citizens are seen in their role of recipients of public services and are expected to help to improve these services by providing evaluations of them. Common instruments are citizen surveys or the ombudsman system. Participation in the evaluation of local politics is excluded from the debate on the impact of new modes of citizen involvement on local democracy since it is regarded as one-sided with the citizen as a customer responding to the quality of public services.

In the actual political practices of both countries, cooperation during the implementation of local politics is predominant. The key aspects of cooperation regarding the provision of services reflect the key issues of the fields of activities of citizen groups, which usually stands for the provision of public services ([7], p. 37; [31], p. 1–2).

In Japan, cooperation mainly occurs through the joint provision of public services. It is mostly realized in the area of social services or welfare and town beautification, with local differences reflecting the special needs and problems of each area. For the most part, women aged 40–60 years volunteer free of charge or in exchange for a small expense allowance to care for the elderly, help with the care of special needs adults and children, and engage in the maintenance of public gardens and greenery. Such volunteering is usually not organized but mainly done by individuals or small local citizen groups. These citizen groups, however, tend to be connected or integrated into bigger “quangos” (quasi non-governmental organizations that perform governmental functions), which provide social or welfare services. Such social welfare organizations offer volunteer groups infrastructure in the form of volunteer centers and a forum for networking ([9], p. 35). In addition, recent developments show that NPOs especially tend to go through a professionalization process because they carry out public services for the city and, in turn, are paid for their service provision by the local administration and thus distinguish themselves as an alternative service provider ([8], p. 425). However they are still limited in number and resources.

In Germany, participation in civil society groups that provide services is mainly done in the fields of social and welfare services, sports, education, and culture. The main actors are huge charitable organizations, such as the Workers’ Welfare Association or Caritas, which are highly professionalized, cooperate on a long-term basis, and are publicly funded. Their long tradition of civil society involvement in providing social services can be regarded as the reason why these charitable groups are recognized by other actors and wield some political influence.

Cooperation, however, goes beyond the phase of policy implementation and includes different aspects of decision making and policy formulation processes. Citizen forums and assemblies as well as deliberative councils are just as important, with the distinction that they are summoned if issues related to their topic occur;

therefore not all of them are permanently active. In addition, citizens volunteer by taking on honorary offices or becoming members of associations that can also provide social services at the local level. For the individual citizen, newly introduced modes of citizen participation represent new instruments for political participation and new opportunities for an integration in political decision making, planning, and implementation. Also, cooperation between civil society actors and local governments occurs in a variety of issues and activity fields. While the scope and scale of participation through service provision is socially and structurally broad, political involvement through participation is almost exclusively undertaken by highly educated, well-paid members of the middle class.

Conclusion

This article has explored the democratic dimensions of local reforms in Germany and Japan. It assumes that a high degree of local autonomy is linked to a high degree of citizen involvement and normative expectations of citizen integration in terms of an improvement in local democracy. Moreover well established, strong local civil society actors can be considered crucial, not only for shaping new modes of participation but for their realization as well ([7], p. 35). The assumptions seem to have the capacity to explain differences between the two countries.

Germany and Japan have responded to the financial crisis through an introduction of new modes of participation at the local level. The call for citizens to join back in is made, and political participation is offered in exchange for civic engagement. While Germany saw the start of this development in the early 1990s, it surfaced a little later in Japan, really taking shape in the year 2000. Under the guiding principle of *Bürgerkommune* and *shimin jichi*, municipalities aim to bring the citizen back in by institutionalizing cooperation between local governments and citizens. The normative ideas behind the guiding principles as well as the new modes of cooperation scarcely show any differences in the two countries, although the institutional contexts differ. The logic of securing legitimization by participation overrides differences in the degree of local autonomy.

Local governments now integrate citizens into all phases of political processes and thus strengthen their position. Many expectations and hopes are connected to this inner reform of public administration. On the one hand, integration of citizens is supposed to raise acceptance regarding decisions made by local governments and make administration work more citizen-oriented. On the other hand, it should reduce costs through new, efficient modes of burden-sharing. It becomes clear that, with the exception of referenda, new modes of participation are not mainly introduced as a way to improve direct democracy but are seen as multipurpose tools. Despite the integration of citizens into all phases of the political process, the final decisions in both countries are still made by the city council. Responsibility remains within the local government. New modes of participation are therefore usually discussed in connection with the concept of cooperative democracy, which is characterized more by coordination and consultation processes between local governments and citizens, and less by the notion of direct democracy.

The guiding principle behind the idea of cooperative modes of participation for citizens is a shift from seeing the citizen as a mere recipient of public services to the idea of “by the citizen, for the citizen” where citizens become co-producers of public services. With regard to the various types of participation in the different phases of a political process, we can observe at least two major roles. First, citizens fulfill the role of co-producers in political decision-making processes; second, they take on the role of supporters of policy implementation processes.

The first function of taking part in political decision-making processes (co-producer) is widely acknowledged for promoting democracy and democratic behavior ([2], p. 28, [23], p. 21–24). This type is widely institutionalized, supported, and funded by local governments in Germany, and plays a decisive role in local decision making. In Japan, new modes of participation are rarely institutionalized and thus direct influence on political decision-making processes is limited. Moreover, while the initiative from the local government to foster participation is strong, financial support is very limited.

The second function of citizens as supporters of implementation of local politics is predominant in both countries (co-provider), but more in Japan than in Germany. The combination of female engagement and lack of recognition and resources is the reason why in Japan participation is focused on cooperation in the provision of public services. This is the field where citizens are most experienced, can expect financial support from local governments, and can gain acceptance by society.

The distinction can be attributed to major differences in structure and tradition of local civil society in Germany and Japan. In the case of Germany, new modes of participation are implemented in the context of a long tradition of civil society that is diverse in scope and scale. This implies recognition by society and financial support from the state and has supported the rise of a broad range of civic expertise in all fields of participation. This is why it has been argued that, in the case of Germany, participation is taken for granted and is now more or less discussed in terms of efficiency ([37], p. 124). In contrast, in Japan the democratic dimension of local reforms has been made a central issue of debate. The shorter tradition of local autonomy and low resources of civil society actors explain the focus of cooperation between local governments and citizens as providers of social services. It would be shortsighted however to argue as Holtkamp and Bogumil do ([14], p. 236) that this kind of participation lacks any potential for supporting the revitalization of local democracy. Participation in cooperation projects is in general not a “voiceless” implementation of municipal initiatives by citizens. Rather, the projects may serve as a training ground for the empowerment of citizens because they offer opportunities for learning by mutual consultation, co-planning, and co-development with the local administration. Through the process of cooperation, civil society actors can access new financial sources and broaden their political capacity, which supports and strengthens their position and status within society. In this regard, the fact that it is mainly women who are engaging implies that overall the democratic dimensions of political reforms should be considered in terms of changing opportunity structures in society.

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